

OVERCOMING DIABETES STIGMA AND HEALTHCARE INEQUALITY

Cajsa Lindberg

Our world needs an initiative like the Young Leaders in Diabetes (YLD) Programme and our goal is clear. We exist because we are helping to build awareness about diabetes worldwide and give young people with diabetes the opportunity for a healthy future.

In my short time as President of the YLD Programme, I have learned that IDF's young leaders are enormously passionate and dedicated to fighting the global burden of diabetes because there are a multitude of problems that need solutions now.

Thousands of people around the world today are fighting to survive because they cannot access or afford the life-sustaining medication that helps to keep them alive. Despite being around for nearly 100 years, insulin is not always accessible to all people living with diabetes that require it, including many members of the YLD. Listening to their stories is heartbreaking and enormously frustrating. One desperate story came from the experience of a young leader who could not afford modern synthetic insulin, forcing a return to the use of traditional pork insulin, which is considered to have less therapeutic efficacy. Even in countries where insulin and diabetes supplies are available, there are huge inequalities in terms of quality of care, psychological support and access to medical devices. It is evident from reports around the world that the needs of many people with diabetes - children, young adults and adults - are simply not being met.



Cajsa Lindberg from Sweden

Elizabeth Rowley, a young leader from the United Kingdom, founded [T1 International](#), an advocacy organisation whose mission is to improve access to insulin, diabetes supplies, medical care and education for people living with type 1 diabetes worldwide. One of T1 International's initiatives includes raising awareness about the healthcare inequalities facing people with type 1 diabetes who cannot afford or access vital diabetes medication and supplies through [#insulin4all](#).

There is also a huge lack of knowledge and awareness of diabetes in society today. The many misconceptions and prejudices that people with diabetes have to deal with are frustrating. It can contribute



112 IDF Young Leaders from over 70 countries participated in the YLD training programme in Vancouver in December 2015

to low self-esteem and a feeling of being a burden on society. The lack of knowledge also means that many people are ashamed to be open about their diabetes for fear of rejection by loved ones or discrimination at school, work and in social situations. For many young people, living with diabetes also means having to deal with that overwhelming sense of loneliness that comes from being different, something that can erode self-confidence and a sense of meaningful place in this world.

Ashley Ng, another young leader from Australia, is a huge advocate for reducing diabetes stigma and discrimination and often writes about it on her blog, [Bittersweet Diagnosis](#). As part of her project, she started and moderates a support group for young adults with type 2 diabetes, a population that is largely misunderstood, isolated and stigmatized. This support group provides members with a feeling of community, helping to reduce isolation while providing a platform for them to share experiences and ideas on raising awareness.

The need for an initiative like the YLD Programme is clear. We exist because young people with diabetes should be able to live life on the same terms as everybody else. It is our duty as young leaders to speak up against these injustices. When my two years as YLD President are over, I hope to have contributed in building a strong and sustainable program that will continue to improve the lives of young people with diabetes

all over the world. The YLD Programme should support the development of future leaders of the diabetes community and empower them to fight for health and human equality, not only for their own rights, but for the rights of all people with diabetes. My hope is that YLD members will continue to strive for change on a local, national and global level today, and will continue their important work in leadership roles within diabetes organisations and communities throughout the world tomorrow.

The YLD Programme is a united and passionate movement that speaks with one voice to fight discrimination and advocate for improved awareness and access to insulin and proper care. I am absolutely honored to be working alongside them as their President.

Cajsa Lindberg is President of the IDF Young Leaders in Diabetes Programme.

